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## Teacher Evaluations in Michigan Public Schools: One Size Fits All

Less than 1 percent of teachers are deemed 'ineffective' in 2013-14

By TOM GANTERT | June 3, 2015 | [Follow Tom Gantert on Twitter](#)

Last year one-half of one percent of Michigan's public schoolteachers were considered to be "ineffective" according to performance evaluations conducted by the nearly 900 charter and conventional school districts in the state.



Those assessments appear at odds with the actual academic performance of students, and teacher evaluations have become problematic in other ways since a state law was passed in 2011 mandating more teacher accountability.

Of the 95,885 teachers evaluated, just 519 earned the lowest rating of "ineffective." Under that 2011 law, a teacher rated "ineffective" three years in a row can be fired. The law also requires teachers' performance to be used in determining who gets laid off when student enrollment falls — decisions that in the past were based almost entirely on seniority.

Some school reformers say the way many Michigan public schools go about evaluating teachers has made the 2011 reform all but moot.

In 237 school districts at least 90 percent of teachers were all clumped together in just one of the four evaluation categories available, which are "highly effective," "effective," "minimally effective" and "ineffective." In 138 school districts, 100 percent of the teachers fell into just one category.

For example, Birmingham Public Schools rated 622 of its 624 teachers as "effective." Farmington Public Schools rated 736 of its 739 teachers as "effective."

Birmingham Public Schools spokeswoman Marcia Wilkinson said the district was transitioning to a new, more complex evaluation system in 2013-14 and therefore didn't rate any teachers as "highly effective."

"You can't be serious about professional development if you rate all your teachers as 'effective,'" said Gary Naeyaert, executive director of the Great Lakes Education Project, a nonprofit pushing for reform in public schools. "You can't have 90 percent of the teachers being 'effective' when only 65 percent of the kids can

read (at third grade). It is an example of gaming the system by the school districts."

Naeyaert said that grouping all teachers together makes it much more difficult to distinguish individuals on the basis of performance. That effectively leads to seniority being the determining factor in layoff decisions, something teachers unions have fought to preserve, but which undermines the intent of the 2011 reform.

Bob Kefgen, associate director of government relations with the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals, said evaluating teachers and administrators is important and carries real consequences.

"This is why it is crucial that our state law promotes evaluation practices that are supported with research so we are making decisions that will have a positive effect on student achievement," Kefgen said in an email. "That means supporting districts with clear guidelines and minimum quality standards for their evaluation systems, training for their evaluators, and funding to support the effort. In that way, we can ensure a consistent level of quality for the evaluation systems in all schools across the state so that we are accurately identifying those educators who are doing a good job and those who need support to improve their practice."

The evaluations done in 2013-14 were an "insult" to the best schoolteachers, said Audrey Spalding, the education policy director at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. There were 178 school districts concluded there wasn't a single "highly effective" teacher in the district.

"Rather than use the tools given to them, school administrators have chosen to give all teachers the same performance rating," Spalding said in an email. "The end result is that layoff decisions are still made on the basis of seniority — instead of keeping the best teacher in the classroom. It's an insult to outstanding teachers."

(31.9%) (59.3%) (2.3%)  
Here's the statewide breakdown: Highly effective - 36,384; Effective - 56,814; Minimally effective - 2,168;  
Ineffective - 519.  
(0.5%)  
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